Cowichan Tribes get $24.2 million to tackle flooding

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The Cowichan Tribes have received $24.2 million in federal funding to ease flooding problems in their area.

Heavy flooding this past January and February affected about 175 Cowichan Tribes homes.

"It had a huge impact on the lives of people in the community," Minister of Infrastructure and Communities Catherine McKenna said Wednesday in a remote news conference. "We need to be making these investments in critical infrastructure that'll make a big difference.

Stabilization of river banks and other measures will protect roads, homes and other buildings, along with archeological sites and wetlands, said McKenna, adding it will also help increase water-storage capacity for the community during summer months, especially during droughts.

She said the project is "critically important" to a long-term strategy to adapt to climate change and extreme weather, including floods.

Cowichan Tribes Chief William Seymour said some of the people hit by flooding this year had to be rescued by boats or trucks.

News of the federal funding was cause for celebration, Seymour said.

"When I heard about this I wanted to let everybody know," he said. "We're so very grateful."

He said Cowichan Tribes will take a holistic approach to the project, looking at all parts of the Cowichan River and estuary. Local government will be involved, as well.

"We need to take care of these lands and waterways to address key concerns within the river system in order for our culture, people, fisheries and economy to be protected and thrive," he said.

Ladysmith Mayor Aaron Stone, chairman of the Cowichan Valley Regional District board, said many groups will be working "to improve the outcome for the whole-watershed approach."

He called the Cowichan River the "life blood" of the Cowichan region.

The project will deal with a range of concerns, including the health of salmon and various ecosystems.

"We all know that a healthy economy and a health environment go hand-in-hand," Stone said.

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